

# VISUAL ART FORMS OF MEDIEVAL INDIA

COMPENDIUM OF NATIONAL SEMINAR PAPERS



Editor

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**Compendium of the articles of the National Seminar**

“Visual Art forms of Medieval India” Jointly organized by

Department of Fine Arts, Yogi Vemana University, Kadapa-516003, Andhra Pradesh

Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, Department of Language & Culture,

Government of Andhra Pradesh and Amaravathi Visual Art Society, Vijayawada.

On 04<sup>th</sup>-06<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

**Copies: 150**

**Price : 500**

The publication of the proceedings are financially supported by

Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi and

Department of Language and Culture, Government of Andhra Pradesh.

The responsibility of the fact stated, opinions expressed, or conclusions reached is the that of the authors of the articles. Convener of the Seminar, Department of Fine Arts, Yogi Vemana University, Kadapa-516003 accepts no responsibility for them.

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09492345419

**ISBN 978 -93 – 5254 – 229 – 1**

Published on behalf the Department of Fine Arts by

**The Registrar,**

**Yogi Vemana University,**

**Kadapa-516003**

March 2016

Cover Design : K.Mrutyunjaya Rao

Acknowledgements: *Cover Design Photograph* by Sri Madhu Jagdeesh,  
Mahalinga Puram, Pollachi -642002 Tamilnadu.

Back cover page image from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vontimitta>

*Printing:*

**Konduru Janardhana Raju**

R.K. Graphics,

Kadapa - 516 001.

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# SUBLIME IN MEDIEVAL INDIAN ART: ETERNAL REALISM BEYOND ABSTRACTION & REPRESENTATION

RAMESH KANDAGIRI

New Delhi

*"True happiness in this world is the right terrestrial aim of man, and true happiness lies in the finding and maintenance of a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body. A culture is to be valued to the extent to which it has discovered the right key of this harmony and organized its expressive motives and movements. A civilization must be judged by the manner in which all its principles, ideas, forms, ways of living work to bring that harmony out, manage its rhythmic play and secure its continuance or the development of its motives. A civilization in pursuit of this aim may be predominantly material like modern European culture, predominantly mental and intellectual like the old Greco-Roman or predominantly spiritual like the still persistent culture of India. India's central conception is that of the eternal, the spirit here encased in matter, involved and immanent in it and evolving on the material plane by rebirth of the individual up the scale of being till in mental man it enters the world of ideas, and realm of conscious morality, dharma"* - Shri Aurobindo

If we remove *abstraction* and *distortion* from 20<sup>th</sup> century exuberant European Modernism then what rules the globe as world art today and even the entire process of its evolution becomes unimaginable. For what geared up modernism in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe has certainly to do with their culture's perennial search for the experience of elevated and liberated ethos of the *sublime*, which has been doubted and regimented for so long

by their successive ancestral mentors, the rationalist philosophers, that finally had to denounce what it once propounded with advocacy as strict discipline in expression of art that is in Greek's sense, *realism* or in Harold Rosenberg's sense, *idealism*. Although meaning of *realism* in art has been undergoing shifting intellectual justifications down the ages yet understanding of *realism* in the wisdom of Asian cultural core is strangely far from change. Reason for seemingly strange this undeterred understanding of Eternal Realism through the vacuum of *sublime* is actually deep-rooted in Indian central conception that from the time immemorial has been inbuilt through the contemplative experiments towards 'gnostic knowing' (knowing the unknown) through *Dhyaana* (meditation for enlightenment), *Yoga* (nerves' stretching postures for attaining harmony between spirit, body & mind), *Tantra* (esoteric practice using body as instrument), *Mantra* (esoteric practice using mind as instrument) and *Yantra* (occult diagram & machinery used as instrument in association with both *tantra* and *mantra*). All these practices required a certain degree of inward progression of the self and concentric contemplation while keeping spontaneous harmony with the law of Nature.

The basic difference between European and Indian approaches is that the former searched outward and the latter searched inward in order to 'know' the world. Medieval Indian Art too has been the